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Terry Goddard praises White Mountain communities' approach to meth problem

By: Mara Reyes , The Independent



Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard tells the candidates for sheriff that Navajo County had done a good job in addressing and fighting the meth problem. Goddard was a special guest at a forum hosted by the White Mountain Democrats Monday at Blue Ridge High School. He added the Arizona Meth Project, through its series of newspaper, radio and TV ads, has made people change the way they look at meth.

don't do it," as Goddard noted. The message in the second phase changes slightly. It will now focus on the impact meth has on the users' circle of friends and those around him or her. The third phase will center on the harm meth has on the users' families. Since the start of Arizona Meth Project, modeled after the Montana Meth Project, awareness of meth and its devastating effects has soared. Goddard said their goal is to raise awareness but not go so over the top that they lose people's attention. (For more information on the project, visit www.arizonamethproject.org.)

However, Goddard noted that the worst part of the meth problem is now a lack of treatment facilities. "We have incarceration, but we need treatment facilities to give hope to people who get caught up in it."

Campbell said the steering committee, during the meeting with the attorney general, addressed the coalition's new focus on attracting treatment facilities to the county.

Goddard also pointed out that, during his five years in office, the number of prosecutions for meth labs dropped dramatically from 400 the first year to under a dozen this year. Although the state never passed a law controlling over-the-counter cold medicines containing pseudoephedrine, one of the main ingredients in meth, he believes that drop is due to the fact that many cities adopted ordinances controlling such medication.

But Goddard noted that the user numbers are still high because a lot of meth is still smuggled in from Mexico. He said Arizona has been working with the Mexican government to stem the flow of methamphetamines.

Mexico has been making progress in reducing the flow of pseudoephedrine into that country, much of it from China, "so the super labs haven't been able to manufacture as much," Goddard said. Mexico had been receiving five times the amount of the medication than the drug companies were using.

"This is manageable. Drug companies have alternative medication. No one ever died of a runny nose. It's a little inconvenient, it could mean a few sniffles, but the benefits are huge," Goddard said.

WHITE MOUNTAINS - Even Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard heard about comedian David Spade's jab at the White Mountains, when he dubbed Show Low "the meth capital of Arizona" on an appearance on The Tonight Show with Jay Jenö. Goddard called Spade's comment a "bad joke."

"He's wrong," Goddard told The Independent, in a Monday morning interview. "David Spade's wrong, but it is serious problem."

However, he admitted that methamphetamine use among youth in Navajo and Apache counties is twice the national average.

"The numbers are scary," he said, noting that methamphetamine use in the state has been the biggest issue and the number one law enforcement problem during his five years in office. "We're making progress, but it's still a problem among youth," he added. Nevertheless, he praised the White Mountain communities for their efforts - one of the best efforts in the state, he said - in trying to find solutions. In the White Mountains to talk about meth and efforts to solve the problem, Goddard met with steering committee members of the Navajo County Anti-Drug Coalition at the Pinetop-Lakeside Town Hall for about 1 1/2 hours with Friends of the Coalition providing lunch.

"The coalition has brought all the players together," Goddard told The Independent, recognizing it as one of the most active and successful of the 22 coalitions in the state.

Coalition Coordinator Debe Campbell updated the attorney general through a Power Point presentation on the coalition's history, activities and successes.

He also talked about the Arizona Meth Project's second phase which will be launched in September. He noted that the first phase - featuring "shocking" TV, print and radio advertising - was very effective in bringing attention to meth's damaging effects.

"There's nothing glamorous about losing your hair, your skin, your teeth, your brain," he said. "Meth is an equal opportunity destroyer. It doesn't discriminate against age, race, income. It hits everybody."

The first phase focused on the harm meth does to the user. "It's messy, don't do it," as Goddard noted. The message in the second phase changes slightly. It will now focus on the impact meth has on the users' circle of friends and those around him or her. The third phase will center on the harm meth has on the users' families. Since the start of Arizona Meth Project, modeled after the Montana Meth Project, awareness of meth and its devastating effects has soared.

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"Meth is still fairly available. The impact hasn't been felt yet at the border, but it's moving in the direction," he added.

Cybersafety

Goddard has also been visiting middle schools and talking about cybersafety to kids and parents. To kids, he tells them how to prevent the dangers of the Internet, what could go wrong and what to do if they are in trouble.

Every time he visits a school, his office will set up a phony profile on popular social networks such as Myspace and Facebook.

"Without a doubt, by the time we visit the school, the profile will have at least 20 to 30 friends. We'll usually hear some gasps when they find out it's phony. Some of them share pretty intimate details," Goddard said.

At a Kingman school, he asked how many students had a page on Myspace and/or Facebook and most raised their hands. But, Goddard said, only about half had ever showed it to their parents. When he asked a girl why she hadn't showed it to her mom, she told Goddard, "She'd kill me."

"It's a pretty dramatic example of why parents would disapprove. That's why parents should see their kids' Web page, know what they're doing with it, who they're talking with, what they've posted themselves, which is sometimes frankly foolish," Goddard said.

"Many parents aren't aware of what their children are doing online. It's just like if the kids go to the store, you should know where they are. It's the same online," he said, adding that tracking software can help parents know which sites their children are visiting and can even receive an e-mail at working if their child visits an inappropriate site.

He also warns parents that they could be liable for their children's online actions, such as cyberbullying. He recommends never keeping a computer in a child's bedroom but rather placing it in a public place.

"Kids are usually more cyber savvy than parents, or parents think it's benign," he said, noting that even if children don't have Internet access at home, they still have access in other places such as school, library and at friends' homes.

The Independent also asked Goddard for his take on other issues. Here's what he said:

Identity theft

The attorney general has also been promoting awareness of identity theft.

"It's the fastest growing felony in the country. Although it's in the jurisdiction of the county attorney, we're still trying to guide people through the process," Goddard said.

A brochure published by his office is available on www.azag.gov (click "ID theft" under "Hot Topics").

Budget crisis

"It's a very serious budget crisis, one of the worst in the country. We're not out of the hole yet. Sales revenues down," Goddard said.

He said he is especially concerned with the crime lab costs, which have been shifted to local law enforcement agencies.

"I understand it's having an incredible impact on local law enforcement agencies. I wish it wasn't so. We're willing to find other ways to help pay," he said.

"It's particularly poignant for me because I got \$18 million from drug seizures to pay for a new crime lab in Tucson because I believe in the lab. It has a critical function, they have to be accessible."

He added, "We will be back in business supporting crime labs in the future, I'm sure."

Former Apache County Sheriff Brian Hounshell

The attorney general's office filed an indictment against Hounshell in May 2005 alleging the then-sheriff used county employees and equipment for personal use or benefit, misappropriating more than \$8,000 of taxpayer money. Hounshell pleaded guilty to one count of solicitation for misuse of public monies, a Class 6 felony.

In December, Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Andrew Klein deferred his one-year sentence to give Hounshell the opportunity to convince the court that he is truly remorseful for his conduct. Hounshell also received three years of supervised probation, 1,000 hours of community service and a \$15,000 fine in restitution for the county.

As for the sentencing, "The judge made some pretty arbitrary decisions," Goddard said. "I understand he's made progress on the community service."

He lamented the time it took to prosecute the case. "It was in limbo for four years. It could have been done quicker, but the case was dismissed, then reinstated and it dragged on. We did what we could to expedite it, but it still dragged on."

Running for governor

When asked if he aspired for the office of governor, Goddard laughed and said he would probably try it again, although it's still a couple of years away. "I tried it once and came very close to it," he said.

**Reach the reporter at mreyes@wmi-central.com*

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